

Gur-Sikhi Beyond Indigeneity and Liberal Pluralism: Aporia and the Pluriversal

Part I: colonial modernity's epistemic order

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Introduction: from *the Sikh* view to a Gur-Sikh enunciation

This chapter argues for a double reassessment of plurality: from the experience of *aporia*, and from displacing the European universal with the decolonial *pluriversal*. The Gur-Sikh tradition offers an aporetic relation to difference and diversity beyond threat, that resonates with a decolonial episteme that ties plurality to the experience of *aporia* – thereby making possible the creation of a world in which many worlds can co-exist, thereby reflecting a heterogeneous pluriversal rather than a homogenous universal.¹

“The pluriversal is horizontal, bottom-up and non-possessable; the universal is vertical and top-down and owned by a dominating group. The pluriversal emphasizes a *particular-particular* relation of being-with-others as co-constitutive, heterogeneous and collaborative; the *universal-particular* operates through a master-slave relation that demands obedience, mimesis and homogeneity. The former concerns experiential engagement, the

¹ Adapted from the Zapatista axiom to fight for a “world in which many worlds fit” which expresses their movement’s ideal of mutual respect, interethnic coexistence, and a non-threatening relation to difference. My reading of pluriverse, however, goes beyond recognition, acceptance, and celebration towards a poetics that *aporia* demands.

latter swings from ‘tolerance’ (left) to ‘zero tolerance’ (right). While the pluriversal is intercultural and inter-epistemic, the universal is neither.” (Bhokal 2019: 4)

“Indian” pluralism differs from, and partially challenges Western notions, but not radically, and certainly not after colonization. Whereas the Gur-Sikh decolonial aporetic pluriversal, fundamentally challenges modern (western *and* Indic nation states’) pluralism.

This chapter begins by resisting the “world religions” model in which *the* Sikh “view” on pluralism is sought, because the colonial origin of the model reflects the bias of setting Christian Europe as the standard to which all else was and still is negatively compared. By attempting to speak from *a* Gur-Sikh “voice” rather than view, I aim to reconceptualize pluralism by adopting a decolonial vocabulary that will unsettle colonialism’s coercive dynamics of assimilation.² The Gur-Sikh tradition provides an example that challenges secular modernity’s location as the only ground a reasonable notion of plurality can arise, as well as resisting a form of indigeneity (already named and formed by the West as “religion”, “faith”, “tribe” etc). It is often assumed that liberalism has a natural affinity with pluralism, but what would it mean to see them as antithetical? A non-liberal theory of pluralism denies Western power the ability to dictate to the rest of the world its regional values as universal truth (as though only *it* had the ability to transcend its “religious” (Christian) roots, while the rest were mired in “religious thinking”). To step beyond colonial modernity’s secular-liberal pluralism, I entertain the decolonial pluriversal. The latter resonates well with how I enunciate a Gur-Sikh perspective with its own values and voice and with its own intercultural, inter-traditional epistemology, uniquely based on egalitarian self-other relations.

Responding as though Sikhism is a fixed object that is being measured against a western scale of “civilization” overlooks an important point: to discern what Gur-Sikhi is *through its interactions* with others, for Gur-Sikhi is not a known object but a living potential able to respond creatively in each new context that arises. What blocks this creative expression is a whole array of colonially-imposed orders of abstraction that demand strictly controlled modes of subservient engagement.

² With colonialism came a certain identity politics of classification which displaced the pre-colonial Gur-Sikh and Gur-Sikhi (open to any “disciple/learner” dedicated to enacting the instructions of the Guru”) to a geographically, ethnically, and religiously defined group and tradition: Punjabi Sikh and Sikhism.

In this regard this chapter will detail a Gur-Sikh aporetic pluriversal using western theory on plurality as a foil. It will be necessary therefore to deconstruct and decentralize the West's cognitive empire to be able to (re)discover a Gur-Sikh voice beyond "what Sikhs (are said to) believe" in the role of being a model "monotheistic" "religion" named "Sikhism".

Should Gur-Sikhi be translated as though it were a stable object, as a "religion" called "Sikhism," then my response to the "Sikh view" (of plurality etc) would subconsciously align with an already determined colonial archive – *as though Gur-Sikhi were a knowledge* (that, once named, could be judged and limited to the private sphere of subjective, i.e., arbitrary, belief).³ This discloses the epistemic bias of the "Enlightenment's" colonial monologue: *the construction of a people into a knowledge* which reflects an *idolatrous naming*. The creative dynamism of each non-Christian tradition is severely subdued if not halted by the power of colonial secular-Christian modernity to reserve that dynamism for itself alone— casting all other religions into fixed *retrospective* dogmas bound to repeat themselves as identities without difference tied to a past-Western-named-self.⁴ But this power of colonial enunciation and representation is challenged by Abeysekara's insight that religion is not a thing that could be named and resists being objectified as such, much less reduced and re-presented as a knowledge, for it is actually an *aporia*. Recalling Derrida, he also asks "and what if *religio* remains untranslatable?" (2002: 67 tr. Gil Anidjar) – that it resists capture by knowledge – thwarting (the Limited seeing – Eye of) Enlightenment subjectivity.

Can any religious tradition be reduced to a mere knowledge independent from its praxis? Should a "living way" become concretized as a particular "philosophical view" alone? Could science for that matter be divorced from experiment and the notion of "working hypotheses"? Both ideological formations whether in religious absolutism or in scientific short-termism ("settled science") reflect the hand of power, ideology, authority and profit structures and therefore express forms of intolerance and willful myopia where an unfixable way is reduced to a "known" view. A *thinking* mind can have a fixed view of itself and others, but the *breathing* body is never self-identical.⁵ Colonial epistemology enacted this shift from embodied praxis to abstract ideals and

³ See Oberoi's (1994) *Construction of Religious Boundaries* and Mandair's (1999) *Religion and the Specter of the West*.

⁴ As authors of modernity are Christians, Christianity is the only tradition to share a *double location, both private and public*: as a religion but also as the authors of secularity. See below.

⁵ Irigaray (1999) discusses Heidegger's, and Western philosophy's, forgetting of the breathing body. Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin:U of Texas P, 1999) 19

identities. Abrahamic orthodoxy – which denies the existential *body* to reach the transcendental mind/logos – is here challenged and reversed by South and East Asian orthopraxies that often center on attunement to the body as a non-human incalculable nature at the expense of the calculating human *mind*.⁶

Though a reformation occurred during the 1870s-1920s under the duress of colonial subjugation and the imposition of various vectors of lack (ie not having a notion of One God, Governance, History, Nation and Reason etc), and though Gur-Sikhi (*Gur-sikh dharam, naam-marga, tiisar-panth, khaalsaa panth, suurat-shabad-jog, gur-shabad-vicaar, raaj-jog, etc*) was transformed into the “religion” of “Sikh-ism”, it did bring about a new transformative praxis, and a radically new egalitarian order. This involved a new vision of the “human being” as a horizontal “interrelational-being” and Warrior-Saint ideal, as well as a new non-identitarian community with no forced conversions, a new notion of *horizontal* sovereignty based on friend-friend “particular-particular” relations (rather than the European-Schmidtian *vertical* friend-enemy “universal-particular”) relations – culminating in the Khalsa Raj of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It is important to note, beyond minority bias, that Ranjit Singh was overwhelmingly voted as “the greatest leader in world history” in a poll conducted by the BBC *World Histories Magazine* in 2020.⁷ But his “humane” and “enlightened” rule praised for its “tolerance, freedom and cooperation” was short-lived (1801-1839). Its “inclusive” “unity” demonstrating the horizontal friend-friend structure was displaced after his death, followed by two Anglo-Sikh wars and British colonization that installed through its universal globalism, the new western-led ideal of an international economic order of nation states, thereby converting Indians to re-make themselves in a vertical order of friend-enemy oppositions along the lines of “religion” – as partition of the country eventually but brutally demonstrated. The key effect of the “conversion” to modern coloniality through the *master*

⁶ See my *Animal Sublime* (2011) where I detail the nonhuman registers located with the body of the animal and the mystic, both of which are suppressed in the conversion to modern degodded subjectivity of the rational human ego.

⁷ 1st Ranjit Singh 38%, 2nd Amilcar Cabral 25%, 3rd Winston Churchill 7%, 4th Abraham Lincoln, 5th Queen Elizabeth 1. BBC World Histories Magazine. Mar 05, 2020, 08:20 PM IST
https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/article-370-abrogation-anniversary-mehbooba-mufti-other-opposition-leaders-restrained-to-prevent-protests/articleshow/102458346.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

(secular-reason) – *slave* (religious affect) verticality, was the establishment of the church-state split which reduced and restricted religion’s authority to the private sphere.⁸

Therefore, we have to begin by acknowledging that we are actually employing a particular European language that assumes a certain epistemic frame which constructs space, time and the other in a unique modern-liberal, secular-Christian, rational way – as Derrida notes, “But we are already speaking Latin” (2002: 66 tr. Ed. Anidjar). Therefore, this western mode of knowledge production, lacking absolute neutrality and objectivity, located in a particular geography shared by a few European colonial powers, itself first needs deconstructing and decentering. The colonial formation of “Sikh-ism” is a mimete of Protestant Christianity (forged under master Western signifiers of “religion”, “nation”, “history”, “reason”). But Gur-Sikhi was not totally captured or converted and still retains enough of its integrity to challenge Europe’s Enlightenment epistemology, despite its overwhelming and near universal adoption across the globe.

From a colonial context the question was not what are Sikh views on plurality, but how do they compare to “our understanding” of plurality? Such superior attitudes outlawed what a real encounter with Sikhs and Gur-Sikhi may have bought about if they had met on the equal terms of a *friend-friend* relation. The imperial power differential created a colonial-Enlightenment epistemology that silenced and continues to silence Gur-Sikhi by creating Sikhism that can be known as a knowledge independent of what actual Sikhs think. This “cognitive empire” (de Sousa Santos 2018) must first be detailed and then decentralized before we can explore a Gur-Sikh enunciation, whether or not it will be heard.

⁸ Coloniality differs from colonialism in that it continues almost unchanged long after formal colonialism has departed. Its various hierarchical forms, grammars of social class/caste/gender stratifications, and order of cultural value persist. Even if renamed, buildings, institutions, laws, bureaucratic systems, economic ties and dependencies all continue the legacy of the structuring and productive force of colonial power – like a language that has become one’s mother tongue and an epistemology one can no longer think without.

Part I: Colonial modernity's epistemic order: universalism/pluralism

Our approach conceives of Eurocentrism as an interpretative paradigm that produces *Europe as an exceptional political and historical entity* by equating it with modernity.

(Araújo and Maeso 2016: 44)

(i) *Scientism: to name and own, “classify and conquer” through race and religion*

To produce a people into a fixed knowledge so as to better manage and control them, colonial science gathered information according to various epistemological “modalities”: *historiographical, observational/travel, survey, enumerative, linguistic, museological, surveillance, anthropological, legal, investigative etc.* (Cohn 1997). Through such modalities science attempts to name the unnamable; its idolatrous belief that it can form scientism – an ideological and ultimately misguided if not arrogant power, for what cannot be seen far outstrips what can, to make all knowledge a mere caricature of life’s complexity.⁹ Post- and de-colonial scholars have long-noted that knowledge as representation is always a projection from a particular geographic location (that is racialized, religionized, gendered, etc). Truth as knowledge is therefore a reduction to someone’s regionally located view as there is no “God’s Eye view” nor a “monological, unsituated and asocial knowledge production” (Grosfoguel in Araújo & Maeso 2015: 24-25) not least because we are beings living in complex interdependent ecologies. “Descartes’ philosophy inaugurated the ego-politics of knowledge: an ‘I’ that assumes itself to be producing a knowledge from nowhere.” A “point-zero epistemology”, that is *doubly located* to appear as “a point of view that does not assume itself as a point of view.” This reflects an “*idolatrous universalism*” that “pretends to replace God and produce a knowledge that is God-like” (cited in Araújo & Maeso 2015: 27).

Alexander Weheliye analyzes this double location and its duplicity. He argues that western modernity (over the *longue durée* – Renaissance, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, Capitalism,

⁹ According to NASA, 95% of the universe is invisible composed of dark energy (68%) and dark matter (27%) – which “we” know next to nothing about. Of the remaining 5% of visible matter, our earth represents only a tiny fraction, perhaps 0.03%. From this perspective materialistic epistemologies cannot but be highly misleading – knowing a person’s by observing their body alone? On the contrary, Indian thought sees the invisible (consciousness) as central. <https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy>

new technologies) gave rise to “reason, secularization, progress, humanism, individualism, rationalization [and] industrialization”. However, “as writers such as Walter Benjamin, Aimé Césaire, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Sylvia Wynter” have argued “slavery, colonialism, scientific racism, and the Holocaust are not, as has often been assumed, aberrations from the ‘higher’ ideals of the modern but lie at its molten nucleus” (2005: 4). At the heart of political liberalism is economic liberalism, at the heart of capitalism is slavery – though partially hidden, the Statue of Liberty has always borne chains.¹⁰ The first thing to note then about colonial scientism is not only its hubris but its duplicitous self-serving nature.

As Europeans figured out their own identity as colonizing globe trotters, they found it epistemically necessary to simultaneously disguise the violating alienation at modernity’s heart by producing and projecting their own “outsides”, spatially and temporally othered as monsters and primitives, to legitimize their Christian/commercial endeavors that promised salvation and progress. We must ponder then a fundamental paradox: *how does blackness or Sikhness, Native Indians or Dalits across the West and East, function as both central to and outside of Western modernity’s cognitive empire?* (Weheliye 2005: 5). The answer in short involves the construction of an authoritative discourse of *plurality* (where Christendom as scientism) classifies, compares, produces maps, conducts censuses and invents concepts that grants itself a double location enabling it to define what modernity, the new world, is, without itself being defined, while simultaneously dictating and restricting the form modernity can take: for a conquering power can camouflage its discriminatory discernment as universal vision. There is then an important hidden relation between the West’s imagined universal and the existential plurality it encounters in the world.

Mignolo has argued that ‘modernity occluded the pluriversal under the persuasive discourse of the universal’ (2003: 435), such that dominant groups (whether Christian Whites or Hindu Brahmins) ‘found themselves enjoying the epistemic privilege of classifying without being classified’ (in Dabashi 2015: xiv). That is, European universalism (i.e., the self-declared superiority of modern rationalism, western progress and Christian ethics) was masked, and thereby preserved, by the rhetoric of universalism on the one hand (“God”, “democracy”, “reason”) and pluralism on the other (“tolerance”,

¹⁰ See Bhogal (2018) “[Removing Statues? Thomas Jefferson and the Structures of Denial](#)”

“multiculturalism”, “freedom”). This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than through the “invention of World religions” (Masuzawa 2005). That the dominant power may choose to tolerate difference ensures that it itself remains undisturbed in its singular command of the power of enunciation and representation. To this day, Article 25 (2)(b) of the Indian secular constitution stipulates that “the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion. (Bhogal 2019: 3)

Plurality was therefore perceived as a threat to the western ego and the assumed universality of secular-Christianity. It diffused and managed the diversity and difference of the other via the invention of a discourse of “religions” and “races” mapped along a temporal “development” of “progress” that ordered, named and plotted the other as “primitive”, “backward”, “underdeveloped”, whilst naming itself “civilized”, “advanced”, “developed” – demonstrating the singular power and privilege of this double-location: inventing the scale and its criteria while retaining sole authority to plot “phenomena”.

This colonial “science”, marshalled to an economic self-interest, is central to modern epistemology and governance. To be more precise Gottschalk, a professor in Religion, writes, the “historical game-changer was not that Britons viewed Hinduism and Islam as mutually antagonistic communities but – less obviously and more perniciously – as mutually exclusive categories of social belonging that bifurcated nearly every societal and cultural dimension of India” (Gottschalk 2013: 182-3). This categorization is not about exclusive identities *per se* but *an alien mode of comparative identification* where Indic idolatrous polytheism or so-called *primitive* monotheism was subordinated to forms of Christian monotheism.¹¹ This hierarchical scale of judgment was *internalized* by Indians, and through a process of intercultural mimesis they identified with European nomenclature as their own “better or potential self”. Such an orientation transformed the census “from an enumerative exercise of the British government to an authoritative representation of the social body and a vital tool of indigenous interests.” Pivoting on a classificatory system “focused on mutually exclusive, essence-defined, religious

¹¹ Friedrich Schelling’s term “henotheism”, and Müller’s “kathenotheism”, both extensively used by the latter to depict Indian “primitive monotheism”.

categories” (Gottschalk 2013: 183) – a people were named into “existence” through scientific knowledge by attributing to them essential but inferior traits.

Therefore, “European classifications of humanity increasingly relied on religions as categories, not only nations and races as before. In time, *religion*, *nation*, and *race* would serve as very particularly defined metacategories of comparison” (Gottschalk 2013: 95). What makes this scientism is the ruling power’s inability to distinguish *objects* from colonial *subjects*, for only the former can be differentiated into “entirely discrete, rigidly bounded, and mutually exclusive categories” (Gottschalk 2013: 56). Subjects are not as simple as objects – unless one wants to merely control them. Power can transform quality into quantity, people into numbers and fixed castes, languages, areas and traditions into pure, unimpeachable, conceptual classes. Counting peoples, religions, languages and accounting for their resources made the British all-India census the “central component” of the “state’s epistemic order” (Gottschalk 2013: 194). Though the question of one’s religious preference did not appear until the 2001 census in the United Kingdom, in the colonies it was foundational since the late nineteenth century operating as “the primary category of difference” (Gottschalk 2013: 199) revealing its inherent duplicity. Daniel Dubuisson charts this centrality of religion not only in the colonies but in the metropole as its fundamental though hidden *modus operandi*:

The West not only conceived of the idea of religion, it has constrained other cultures to speak of their own religions by inventing them for them. Religion is not only the central concept of Western civilization, it *is* the West itself in the process of thinking the world dominated by it, by its categories of thought.” (Dubuisson 2003: 93)

Thus, Europe’s colonial endeavors were not merely to name and own the other (as inferior), but to do so as a self-making project and thereby name themselves as superior. Europe invented themselves through a dual process: making “WestMan” by making “EastMan” and the key concept they achieved this by, according to Dubuisson, was “religion.” This epistemic force that transformed a *people into a knowledge* displaced the difficulty of translating the other’s difference in the colonial encounter with the ease of representing them as lesser versions of the European same – ie. beings of lack (whether they lacked, soul, intellect, morality, history, one-God). Clearly it is

this interpretive power of re-presentation that enabled Europe’s cognitive empire to emerge. Edward Said argues that “*imperialism has monopolized the entire system of representation [ie forming an episteme]*” that he called “orientalism” – the view from the center of colonial power about those they colonized. Colonial representation is a narrative power that not only names but makes oppositional publics, hence its “divide and rule” axiom. Lord Birkenhead, the British secretary of state for India, in March 1925 wrote:

The split between [the Congress] and the independents is a new and promising and unexpected development. I hope that it will grow. But I have always placed my highest and most permanent hopes upon the eternity of the Communal Situation. The greater the political progress made by the Hindus, the greater in my judgement will the Moslem distrust and antagonism become”.

The frictionless relation, indeed inseparability, between economic brutality and epistemic seduction, between colonial power and modern knowledge, between artillery fire and academic capture, is exemplified by one of the founders of Indian and religious studies, the orientalist scholar Friedrich Max Müller: “Let us take the old saying, *Divide et impera*, and translate it somewhat freely by “‘Classify and conquer’.”¹² This aligned orientalist representations to colonial conquest, linking the production of knowledge to the operations of power, thus disguising a sly deception beneath a veneer of scientism.¹³ Michel de Certeau captures the deceptive nature of colonial, if not all, knowledge and its scientific representation well in its denial of praxis in favor of theoretical abstraction:

The operation in question is rather sly: the discourse gives itself credibility in the name of the reality which it is supposed to represent, but this authorized appearance of the ‘real’ serves precisely to camouflage the practice which in fact determines it. Representation thus disguises the praxis that organizes it.

¹² F. Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution with Two Essays on False Analogies, and the Philosophy of Mythology* (London: Longmans, Green, 1873), 122–23. Cited in Chidester (2014: 59).

¹³ For example, the historian Andrew Zimmermann has analyzed the correspondence between the German anthropologist Felix von Luschan and Lieutenant Ralf Zürn over African skulls noting that the production of such knowledge “transformed administrators and soldiers into anthropological collectors and colonial raids and massacres into scientific expeditions” (cited in Chidester 2014: 30). This is not surprising because, “the hegemony of Western-originated systems reflects the epistemic dominance that accompanied military, economic, and political control...” European “naval supremacy, commercial expansion, industrial dominance, and military rivalry all demanded new information about the world – natural and human – in order to better navigate, negotiate, subjugate, produce, and destroy” (Gottschalk 2013: 44).

Hence the ease with which Colonisers ignored the people but poured over their texts to create caricatures about them. Such imperial scholars, like Max Müller “operated at the symbolic nexus of knowledge and power that made the empire a reality” (Chidester 2014: 83).

Chidester concludes “Like imperial exhibitions, imperial comparative religion collected, condensed, and displayed the empire as a sign and signal of its global scope and domination.” (2014: 85) The British imperial slogan “Christianity, Commerce, Civilization” (Chidester 2014: 28-29) meant that material accumulation was also accompanied with intellectual accumulation which extended one’s “cultural or civilizational capital”; thus, England had absorbed the best of the world – “conscience from the Hebrews, will from the Romans, reason and taste from the Greeks, and spiritual imagination from Asia” (Chidester 2014: 86) The power of this over-riding monological consumption frames the meaning any particular dialogues had. Chidester argues, “this centralized accumulation of thought, this concentration of ways of thinking about others, was, by unspoken definition, as a matter of implicit principle, incomparable, a kind of knowledge... [that] could compare without being compared” (2014: 87). This has only continued. Analyzing contemporary scholarship, Bindu Puri discerns a “greater tendency for Euro and Anglo American centrism to exit from the front and enter from the back door, as it were, and continue to influence the terms of the debate.” (Puri and Kumar 2021: 176). Dubuisson argues this duplicitous ability allowed Europe (via the concept of religion/Christianity) to totalize the field of representation as its “central reference point... from which it has conceptualized the others – all others...” And assuming itself as the Archimedean point, “around which it constructed, organized, and developed itself by erecting its own system of beliefs and representations” (2003: 11), Christianity/Religion becomes the key to unlock colonial modernity’s epistemic order. Therefore, Dubuisson argues, if religion is so central to the western worldview, then “the West cannot, at the risk of its own disintegration, do without it, because these global conceptions would then decompose into scattered or juxtaposed fragments...” (2003: 94), leading him to ask: “Would not abandoning the idea of religion be the equivalent for Western thought of abdicating part of its intellectual hegemony over the world?” (2003: 94). Without “religion” the West loses its control over the world as-a-knowledge, so it “prefers to continue to espouse bad epistemology rather than abandon the description of reality according to its own canons” (2003: 94-5). Here is a self-centeredness, a “theo- and ego-politics of knowledge”

(Mignolo 2006: 206-207), that discloses an unmistakable idolatry at the heart of Euro-American's globalized epistemology:

... through the idea of religion, the West continuously speaks of itself, even when it speaks of others. For when it does so, it is implicitly in relation to the perfected model that it thinks itself to be. This is narcissistic objectification. (Dubuisson 2003: 95)

Internationally, no other tradition has this privilege except the Secular-Christian West. Though nationally, there are many mimetic copies, all, however, are colonially constructed. India for example, operates a “Hindu” hegemony which is reproducing the same duplicitous power and “bad epistemology” with its near total control of major news outlets and its zealous control of social media platforms giving rise to a far-reaching censorious “digital authoritarianism” (Yilmaz & Saleem 2022).¹⁴ Whether western or eastern both allow “reasonable disagreement” but outlaw the necessity to value plurality-as-*equal* difference – for this will challenge their intellectual hegemony over (the manufacture) public reality.

Decolonial scholars, engaging the insights of Frantz Fanon (1952), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and (Saldívar-Hull, 2000), speak of the necessity to shift from the suppressed theo- and ego-politics of knowledge in the Cartesian-Kantian-Hegelian legacy, towards a geo- and body-politics of knowledge (Mignolo 2006: 213). Guru Nanak was certainly very early in charting a geography of politico-spiritual “knowledges” and engaging in dismantling ego-politics of knowledge by recentering wisdom in the body, unmediated by state, civil, religious, and ascetic functionaries, and practices. This brings to fore the important issue of “exteriority” as distinct from “the other as an outside”.

A Christian can voice any *view* about Christianity *and* every other tradition, but without ever having to abide by a singular representation of itself; no other tradition has this extraordinary power of *enunciation*, and relative freedom from the force of being represented. All other traditions exist within a representative view of themselves enunciated by Secular-Christian colonial modernity. They are captured by an abstract knowledge, bereft of the power to enter dialogue as

¹⁴ On the World Press Freedom Index India has gone from being “problematic” to “very bad/serious” dropping to 161st out of 180 countries.

an equal contributor – exactly as Fanon was shocked to realize that he was an object in the world and not a subject, and “not only must the black man be black, he must be black in relation to the white man” (1967: 77-78). The theosophist, Annie Besant said, ‘the genius of the Empire is to make every nation that you conquer feel that you bring them into the Imperial Family’, even though she was an advocate for Irish and Indian self-rule (Chidester 2014: 257). This is exteriority, not simply otherness [*otherness exists before exteriorization but not after*] – for one’s otherness has been dismissed and re-presented as a manageable difference, that acts as a governable “exterior” to Europe’s “interior”. To be “sealed into that crushing objecthood” that de-subjectifies is the only way to be recognized in modernity’s episteme as existing at all, in the zone of non-being, (Chakrabarty’s “waiting room of history” below).

Mignolo elaborates that the spatially othered infidel and the temporally othered primitive do not exist “outside” of modernity but within its “exteriority”, because they “were constructed precisely by the rhetoric of modernity” *as an outside* (2007, 472). He continues, “The outside of modernity is precisely that which has to be conquered, colonized, superseded and converted to the principles of progress and modernity” (2007, 462). Simply put, exteriority indicates a story that invents the outside from the perspective of a gaze from an inside (Europe): “The outside of ‘tradition’ is invented in order to insure the inside as the locus of enunciation of knowledge. ‘Tradition’ is not a way of life that pre-dated ‘modernity’ but an invention of the rhetoric of modernity.” (Mignolo 2007, 472).

There are then two outsides then. The real otherness of Gur-Sikhi outside of western epistemology, and the fake otherness of Sikh-ism constructed by western epistemology as a manageable exterior distant from its interior. GurSikhi and its aporetic pluriversal lies outside of Western narration, but Sikhs exist within it as followers of Sikhism – *known* as a monotheistic religion alongside other similarly constructed “religions”: Hindu-ism, Buddh-ism, Jain-ism, Tao-ism, Shinto-sim, etc as well as “indigenous traditions” who do not exist at all how they used to before colonization.¹⁵ Pre-colonial alterity is largely if not wholly lost in the exteriorizing effects of colonial cognition. The truly other (*gur-sikhi*) is thereby partially negated and its threat managed

¹⁵ And this same European epistemology dominates whether as the western *secular-Christian* hegemon or its mimetic copy: the Indian *secular-Hindu* hegemon. Furthermore, this imperial inheritance unites otherwise opposed INC and BJP parties as both aspire to be modern developing nations.

(by the knowledge of Sikhism). In contrast to Guru Nanak's "multidirectional memory" (Rothberg 2009), where the others difference is a gift to be engaged and included to form part of one's way of seeing and being, Dubuisson chart's Europe's opposite course which involves:

the erasure of all strangeness, every alterity. Siberian shamanism, Roman civic rites, voodoo ceremonies, prehistoric rock carvings, and many other phenomena have been indistinguishably 'formatted' to the dimensions and calibration of our mental frameworks. (2003: 91-2)

Tolerance of plurality is pitched as some kind of virtue and unique achievement of modern Western societies – but "we" tolerate only up to a certain point: for plurality, tolerance and liberalism operate as tokenistic forms of modern management and policing that disguise the darker sides of a colonial epistemology's intolerance, in whose core resides a homogenized interior modern subjectivity (be it the Secular-Christian, or its mimete the Secular-Hindu).

European attitudes towards pluralism were always politically motivated to measure and massage population numbers whether via language or religion. Indeed, this subjectivity unites them both into a singular form. For example, Panjab's heterolinguality, where language was not tied to religion, was systematically fragmented, by inventing singular and homogenous mutually exclusive "mother tongues", via the space of the "homolingual" (Sakai 1997) or "monolingual" (Derrida 1996):

English was never learned through the mother tongue. Rather a mother tongue had to be invented as a specter or mirror image... of the English other. The paradox here is that the idea of unity of 'one's own' had to be invented in order to break with what was *actually* one's own, namely, the heterolingual. (Mandair 1999: 99)

Colonial epistemological forcibly connected the monolingual with the monotheological tying language to religion creating a new mode of identification: I speak Panjabi *so* I am a Sikh; I speak Urdu *so* I am a Muslim; I speak Hindi *so* I am a Hindu. With Panjabi's heterolinguality suppressed then *Urdu*-speaking Pakistan (an overtly Islamic nation) becomes distinct from *Hindi*-

speaking India (a covertly Hindu nation). But why should the enunciation of a linguistic identity automatically express a religious identity? (Mandair 1999: 99-100). We begin to see the profundity of Guru Nanak's "there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim" here and how it resists the Aristotelian logic of colonial epistemology which results in a religio-linguistic identity politics where voting blocks, quotas and partition make the only rational sense.¹⁶ Panjab's heterolingual reality was displaced for politically expedient monolingual fictions (of religions, races, languages), and Panjabi's inherent heterogeneity was reduced to measurable mutually exclusive and controllable identities.

Below we will see the Sikh Gurus organized society, not by number, but by the quality of one's *loving* awareness, the dedication and service to others, built institutions that served all, high and low, and undid the deeply ingrained notions of in-groups and out-groups by connecting them through their scriptural insights. And this is precisely why they threatened various centers of power. Gottschalk writes that we need to question and challenge "the categorical presumption of monolithic, conflated religious/political/linguistic identities..." and asks "the question remains how much latitude for understanding we allow ourselves today when the imperatives to concrete, singular classifications are so particularly prevalent in our scientific age?" (2013: 338). This duplicitous and discriminatory universal/pluralism dialectic needs further reflection because it overlooks a key battle between French universalism and British Globalism.

(ii) *A discriminatory universalism: inequality and knowledge*

Reviewing Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2002) *Provincializing Europe*, Amit Chaudhuri writes, if "modernity has already had its authentic incarnation in Europe: how then can it happen again, elsewhere?", leaving the non-West in the limbo of Chakrabarty's potent image of the "imaginary waiting-room of history". Here, employed, is a "view of history and modernity that has, according to Chakrabarty, at once liberated, defined and shackled us in its *discriminatory universalism*".¹⁷ My emphasis of Chaudhuri's phrase ponders how a universalism can be

¹⁶ "na ko hindu na ko musalman", in *B40 Janamsakhi*, see McLeod (1980: 255). Being a *true* Hindu is often runs counter to the identity of being a Hindu, hence the hypocrisy the Gurus and bhagats constantly sing about – being Hindu only by name or birth. See (GGs 140) below.

¹⁷ Chaudhuri, Amit. "In the Waiting-Room of History," *London Review of Books* Vol. 26 No. 12 · 24 June 2004. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v26/n12/amit-chaudhuri/in-the-waiting-room-of-history>

particular, and so, discriminatory. If it were universal, how can it be applicable to some and not others? This flaw in colonial logic has been duly analyzed by much postcolonial critique into various pernicious hierarchical binaries starting with the civilized/barbaric fiction all the way to Darwin's "favoured" "races," and perhaps the most powerful vector of Europe's discriminatory universalism: the general notion of "religion" (Dubuisson 2003; Masuzawa 2005; Mandair 2009; Gottschalk 2013; Chidester 2014).¹⁸

But this discrimination manifested differently across Europe. Kapil Raj notes a split in two imperial colonial powers as they form "The West" and its *epistemological* modernity: French "universalism" and British "globalism". In contradistinction to *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, British globalism held fast to the irrevocable importance of *property* and *inequality* for a properly civil society. Edmund Burke in 1790 claimed equality to be unnatural as well as impractical being unrealizable as a goal: "you think you are combating prejudice, but you are at war with nature" (Raj 2007: 140-1). In his eyes the *natural order of things* was clearly based on inequality and hierarchy – hence the elitist colonial education of the *bhadralok*, employed the resonances it had Brahmanical caste and class divisions to forge "an alliance between the British and Hindu elites in order to confine and finally vanquish the French and their ideology..." (Raj 2007: 25). Richard Wellesley (1760–1842), the governor general of the Indian territories of the East India Company in 1797, argued to the East India Company's Court of Directors in London, that a college (Fort William) needed to be set up to counter this French ideology ("mischief"), arguing "to fix and establish sound and correct principles of religion and government in their minds at an early period of life, is the best security which can be provided for the stability of the British power in India" (Raj 2007: 147-8). Wellesley aimed to "inculcate in the future writers of the Company the necessity of stable social structures" precisely "to counter pernicious Gallic egalitarian ideas". Raj continues, "It is interesting again to compare this idea of stable hierarchical social structures to Burke's description of Hindu society and the parallels he draws between the Brahmins and the English nobility" jointly imagined as "Aryas" – not only representing "Hinduism" as a "very old

(accessed July 21, 2023) online – no page numbers.

¹⁸ "Civilization," Morris Jastrow [scholar of religion] observed, "is essentially a struggle against nature" (in Chidester 2014: 305). In the history of religions, the great divide between natural, "savage", or "primitive" religions and "civilized" religions formed the basic principle of classification.

monotheistic religion” but also naturalizing its hierarchical social structures as “civilized” and “fortunate” (Raj 2007: 149).¹⁹

Raj notes, like the Calcutta college, the Royal Institution was created out of the same anxieties—to form a bulwark against the French Revolution. In Humphry Davy’s inaugural address of 1802, the chemist and inventor remarks on the foundational stones of Modern colonial epistemology:

The unequal division of property and of labour, *the difference of rank and condition amongst mankind, are the sources of power in civilized life*, its moving causes, and even its very soul; and in considering and hoping that the human species is capable of becoming more enlightened and more happy, we can only expect that the great whole of society should be ultimately connected together by means of knowledge and the useful arts; that they should act as the children of one great parent, with one determinate end, so that no power may be rendered useless, no exertions thrown away. (Raj 2007: 157-8)

The binding agent and means is *knowledge*, *utility* is the only value, and *inequality* is the source of power of *civilized* life – which is marshalled to *one master* and driven to *one commercial end*. The union of these conceptual vectors of educative force reveal British universalism and morality to be inherently discriminatory and compromised – (French universalism notwithstanding for its egalitarian ideals did not translate to those they colonized). One of the many examples Chidester cites, regarding the “enduring opposition between the primitive and the civilized” is, for example, Alfred C. Haddon’s “the ethnology of the lower races and the sociology of the higher” (2014: 290). Chidester comments, “In the empire of religion, this disciplinary distinction between sociology and ethnology marked the great divide between citizens of the world’s religions and subjects of native superstitions” (2014: 38), creating a “racialized division of academic labor” (2014: 290).

¹⁹ After the dissolution of Company Raj in 1858 educating Indian civil servants moved to Oxford’s Indian Institute. Its 1883 Sanskrit inscription reads in part: “This Building, dedicated to eastern sciences, was founded for the use of **Aryas** (Indians and Englishmen) by excellent and benevolent men desirous of encouraging **knowledge**. . . .” (Raj 2007: 154-5)

We have already noted that western epistemic dominance was always central to colonization. Chidester, in his book length study, concludes that there exists

a remarkable continuity from British imperialism to American neoimperialism in justifying the field of study as an intellectual instrument of international trade, military conquest, and political administration of alien subjects...[such that]... Such strategic justifications for the study of religion and religions have persisted. (Chidester 2014: 288).

Indeed, citing the work of the sociologist, Frank Füredi (1998) Araújo and Maeso provide us with a contemporary example that western modernity followed British globalism rather than French universalism: “UNESCO’s rejection of race as a scientifically and politically consensual concept since the 1950s led to the rise of ideas of *cultural difference* and *pluralism* – rather than equality – in international political and academic debate, which would have an impact on debates in education.” (2015: 15). This aligns inequality with plurality and reveals the West’s negative relation to otherness, and managed by such a discourse, liberal terms such as “multiculturalism”, work to perpetuate racism rather than lesson it. For if universalism is a secular-Christian-commercial globalism in disguise explicitly formulated upon inequality, then multiculturalism is employed to continue that power differential through the management of the threat non-Christian religious traditions pose. This is why “debates on the multicultural curriculum and multiperspectivity have failed to unsettle Eurocentrism and to produce a profound critique of the construction of the core idea of the national/European/Western ‘we’ in which the ‘other’ is to be included.” (Araújo and Maeso 2015: 16).²⁰ Therefore the issue here is not about correcting religious or racial representations but gaining access to resources that grant one’s voice the public power to challenge this discriminatory universal/plural structure of differential value.

Noting how far away savagery is from civilization, the director of the Bureau of American Ethnology, John Wesley Powell, argued that civilization had been advanced only by “one great stock of people—the Aryan race” (Chidester 2014: 294-5). Exceptionalism was originally European, Christian and *its* “universal” has always been deeply inflected by the assumption of

²⁰ “However, it is a collective political endeavour that the hegemonic Eurocentric paradigm is not only unwilling, but also *ill-prepared*, to embrace, entrenched as it is, to paraphrase Maldonado-Torres, in its *will-to-ignorance* ‘with good conscience’ (2004, p. 36)” (Araújo and Maeso 2015: **19-20-21?**).

this fundamental inequality. W.W. Hunter, the director general of statistics of the Indian Civil Service, also saw plurality negatively, in that he “did not value diversity because it represented the degradation of distinctive racial and religious characteristics, two of the more important elements presumably required to forge (and identify) a nation’ (Gottschalk 2013: 253). Race and religion mirror each other and as such represent the hidden mechanism at the heart of modernity coloniality – as Gil Anidjar argues, “religion and race are *contemporary*, indeed, coextensive and, more over, coconcealing categories.” (2008: 28).²¹

(iii) *The doctrine of Universal Man*

What are you without racism? Are you any good? Are you still strong? Still smart? You still like yourself?... If you can only be tall because somebody’s on their knees, then you have serious problem... And *they* [white people] should start thinking what *they* can do about it. Take me out of it.

— Toni Morrison, *Interview on Charlie Rose*, May 7, 1993.

Only by becoming inhuman can the human being pretend that they are.

— JAMES BALDWIN, *The Price of the Ticket*

If we take Anidjar’s insight seriously regarding the inseparability of the religion-race rhetoric at the heart of colonial modernity, then Dubuisson’s understanding of the centrality of religion is clearly and uncannily echoed by Morrison’s and Baldwin’s understanding of race.²² All three disclose how the deceptive veil of the West’s liberal pluralism and its in/tolerance disguises a discriminatory universalism that dehumanizes those it exteriorizes. Europe’s colonial exterior concerns the ceaseless production of beings “on their knees”, while those within its metropolitan interior “stand tall” commanding public space, judging those on the periphery as “outsiders” – and not mythic projections of their own epistemology. The rest of the world and all its diverse peoples are still waiting for “white people” to start this self-reflection, as well as their various

²¹ To redress the near total focus on race, I’ve foregrounded religion as an important co-constitutive colonial vector.

²² From a Gur-Sikh perspective it is not a white problem that is the real issue, but a human one of ego (*haumai*).

mimetic copies across the globe – like the INC and the BJP “Hindu”-led majoritarian nationalism.

Clearly, the “white” referred to here is not only, or even primarily, a color, but a discourse of power that normalizes subject populations through the vectors of race, religion or caste – there are parallels across the problem of the color line, the persecuted heathens and the question of untouchability. The “human” being internalized by most is Europe’s *imperial subjectivity*, despite it being overdetermined as “White, bourgeois, heterosexual males as the human” who are “foundational to Western modernity” (Drexler-Dreis & Justaert 2020: 4). The coercive mimesis of this subjective ideal – set by the frame of an international system of modern nation states – even in those pre-colonial structures such as caste, end up reciprocating parallel forms of inequality. It is not only how white gets echoed as *brahmin*, but also how black gets mirrored as *dalit*, *tribals*, *OBCs*, *SC*, *ST* to reflect comparatively a juridico-legal history of prejudice (Pandey 2013).

Here, I argue, modernity’s discriminatory universalism acts like a magnetic field drawing these two coconcealing discourses into resonant proximity. Indeed, Pandey approaches something akin to the pluriversal in wanting to write “a new kind of comparative history, one in which we deal not in universals already understood but in the assumptions that underlie our individual histories and our particular universals – thereby challenging the very claim to a single overriding and ahistorical universalism (or prejudice!)” (2013: 9). Within the spaces modernity affords, regardless of their particular genesis, such groups live in a zone of *Imperial unbeing* (kneeling); while “Man” – Wynter’s term for Imperial Being – stands tall dictating from the center of being. But what is he without colonial-modernity’s religio-racial-making of others on their knees?²³ What is capitalism without workers? Freedom without slavery? Liberal tolerance without its intolerance? Western universalism without plurality? A European nation without its diverse multiculturalism? What is the brahmin without dalits? Still strong? Still smart? Still Pure?

²³ Wynter presents the historical development of Man by describing a move from the theocentric Christian descriptive statement of the human as Man to an invention of Man as political subject (a shift occurring between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries) and then to an invention of Man based on biological sciences and racializing discourses (beginning in the eighteenth century). (Drexler-Dreis & Justaert 2020: 12)

Why assume religions to be plural, subjective and the secular ground of “thinking” to be singular, objective? Why assume this singular subjectivity to be homogenous, kitted-out with a secular-liberal rationality – whether religious or not?²⁴ If pluralism becomes a liberal-moral secular rhetoric employed to manage the difference of racial and religious/caste others so that western subjectivity can maintain the dominance of its universalism, then the decolonial task requires “unsettling” this “Universal Man”, this subjectivity, by imagining the human and his subjectivity outside of European conceptualization.²⁵ Wynter argues that the deconstruction of Man as a model of being “is to be found not in the neoliberal humanist piety of *multiculturalism* of the 1980s, but in the poetics of a new *propter nos* that began with the ‘general upheaval’ of the 1960s.” (Drexler-Dreis & Justaert 2020: 7-8). One could easily argue that various counterpublics were also occurring centuries earlier in the East, regarding India’s bhakti and Gur-Sikh movements – both challenged elite religious knowledge, the latter also state formations, with an aporetic poetics of humility and new forms of cross-traditional solidarity. Be that as it may, there is a need for a critical counter-consciousness to “de-civilize” colonial modernity’s “Man” and “de-humanize” its “human”.

(iv) *Dehumanizing humanitas*

Earlier we saw how the European civilized/barbaric binary operated via notions of unequal races and religions, to shape the academy – recall Haddon’s “the *ethnology* of the lower races and the *sociology* of the higher”, this is actually based on a more fundamental origin: *anthropology* and the *humanities*. *Humanitas* signifies Plato and Aristotle, the civilized, the foundation of the modern active intellect, its virtue and morality (that the humanities explore). But *anthropos* symbolizes its underdeveloped shadow, the barbaric, backward primitive, who is idle with an oversexed morality (that anthropology and ethnology observe). This binary, which assumes an unequal beginning given their colonial origin – (orientalism and anthropology were disciplines to comprehend the colonized) – provides the focus of a decolonial intervention “from the darker side of modernity, and from the locus of enunciation of the *anthropos*” (Sithole in Grosfoguel 2016: 115). This is crucial to comprehend because it reveals how Europe assumed not only its voice

²⁴ See my forthcoming “Forbidden Turn” for an exploration of the pluralities of subjectivities.

²⁵ Elsewhere I have argued for re-imagining this rational *cogito* by recalling from the oppressed subjective registers of our animal instincts and mystic intuitions a more whole being that I call an animal sublime. (Bhogal 2010).

could enunciate universal truth, but saw themselves as embodying that very truth, while simultaneously interpellating non-Europeans as “fallen”, “savage”, “underdeveloped” particulars of their invented universal “truth”. The idea that Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains are particular instances of the universalized Hindu, in the Indian constitution, finds its origin in this European distinction between civilized (pure) *humanitas* and savage (impure) *anthropos*.

Here is another expression of the double location privilege – of being an *anthropos* but speaking in the voice of an invented *humanitas* which afforded only to the west the ability to claim a scientific status to their classification, definitions, interpretations and representations of all other *anthropoi* – who simultaneously were denied this power of enunciation. This is why it is necessary to move beyond colonial-modernity’s Cartesian-Kantian-Hegelian “‘degodding’ of being, which was essential to the invention of Man insofar as it allowed the conquering European Man to take ownership of the world” as a *moral crusade* (Drexler-Dreis and Justaert 2020: 5). But, as Sithole asks, “If modernity is salvation, why does it create subjection?” then, “it is the task of decoloniality to reveal the deception embedded in the project of modernity.” That is, if “it is the task of the *humanitas* to defend modernity”, then “it is the task of the *anthropos* to unmask what modernity hides” because, as with India, “there is a problem in a world with its postcolonial condition to reappropriate and reproduce the colonial structural tendencies embedded in modernity (Sithole in Grosfoguel 2016: 119–121). The deception here is duplicitous, it is Janus faced. On the one hand it “civilizes the *anthropos* to be in the existential domain of the *humanitas*”, but on the other it subjugates and “makes explicit the *anthropos* cannot be the *humanitas*...” Sithole concludes, “Modernity is exclusively a Euro-North American expansionist project of claiming to redeem the *anthropos* by erasing it” (Sithole in Grosfoguel 2016: 121).²⁶

When “barbarians” who lacked a soul in the religious sixteen century morphed into “primitives” who lacked a human biology in the secular-scientific nineteenth century, an *epistemic* continuity becomes evident between being Christianized to later being civilized: “Negroes lacking

²⁶ Is this inclusive exclusion not what Hindutva and other mimetes embroiled in a revisionist and violating nationalism replicate in performative excess? A Hindu-projected expansion to redeem and re-make India a Hindi-Hindu-Hinduism-Hindustan? This fascistic fantasy of total control has long been fancied by Europe, not just the Nazis. Nehru’s secular India is as problematic as Modi’s religious India, as both continue the same colonial epistemology whose cognitive empire is built on the religio-secular binary whether they mobilize the rhetorically “Hindu-ized” masses covertly or overtly.

intelligence” in the sixteen century are re-framed as having “low IQ levels” in the twentieth century (Grosfoguel in Araújo & Maeso 2015: 36-7). It not surprising then that decolonial scholars call for an epistemic disobedience, a deconstruction and decentralization of this cognitive empire – whether in white or brown mask?

Open to other psycholinguistic worlds and their different subjectivities, the Gur-Sikh movement did the opposite – for Guru Nanak travelled to many particular *anthropoi* (“people”) and collected their work as the “Word of God” worthy to be included in his collections that would later be collated into the Adi Granth/ Guru Granth Sahib.²⁷ Guru Nanak was therefore rehabilitating plurality from the ground up, side-stepping imperial and orthodox religious forms of elite representation. This means maturing from “provincial epistemological traditions claiming universality for themselves to creating a space open to a *horizontal* dialogue between epistemes from different traditions” (Aman in Grosfoguel 2016: 96). The western university of master/slave produces a vertical monologue; the “pluriversity” would engage a dialogue between equals. This bottom-up movement that gathered the neglected Word and its diverse voices of *anthropoi* and setting them side-by-side with elite *humanitas* (“cultured”, “civilized”): shudras next to brahmins, ascetics next to householders, sufis and bhagats next to siddhas and sipahis – the Sikh Gurus systematically destroyed the sole ownership of (the double location of) privileged speech.

Wynter describes this as a process of taking back what we understand as the “Word” (Drexler-Dreis & Justaert 2020: 4). There is a resonance with the Guru’s Word here – where the suppressed animal and mystic registers of WORD can be re-awakened, contacted, and perception revolutionized by an affective sensorium that allows love to guide reason, affect to guide logic, and re-enchanted the individual that unsettle Man. Degodding is countered by re-enchantment of thinking via dream, vision, intuition and instinct.

²⁷ All references to the Guru Granth Sahib, compiled in 1604 as Adi Granth, will be abbreviated GGS followed by the page, with *rag* and author given in the Appendix: M1 = Guru Nanak (1469–1539); M2 = Guru Angad (1504–1552); M3=Guru Amar Das (1479–1574); M4=Guru Ram Das (1534–81); M5=Guru Arjan (1563–1606); M9=Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–75). “M” stands for mahala, “place, abode; mansion, palace” but also “court, chamber (esp. that of God); presence of God” (Shackle 1981).

Unlike colonial modernity's comparative scientism, Gur-Sikhi's complete openness and worship of the infinite diversity of forms that its One-Many absolute (*ek-anek*) expresses,²⁸ "opposes the fundamentalist position of comparing, measuring, evaluating, and judging human experiences" (Sithole in Grosfoguel 2016: 120). Therefore it shares the decolonial "commitment to obliterate the ontological distinction between the *humanitas* and the *Anthropos*" and attempts "to bring to an end the monolithic "I" of the *humanitas* through coalition with the "we" of the *anthropos*." (Sithole in Grosfoguel 2016: 130). Fundamentally this involves the un-making and re-making of a plurality of subjective registers.

(v) *Manufacturing subjectivity by remaking otherness as exteriority*

Analyzing Eurocentrism, Araújo and Maeso argue that it is "crucial to move beyond a focus on prejudiced representations" to seeing modernity itself as a Eurocentric interpretive paradigm, a discourse of power, that "enacts the exceptionality, universality, and whiteness of Europe, and its naturalization" (2016: 5). The invention of the Euro-American West paved the way for establishing "the universality of European history and subjectivity. Such a universality is not limited to matters of geographic location, but includes the inauguration of modes of thinking that define global reality" (Rabasa 1994, 8). "Eurocentrism is not therefore mere ethnocentrism, but a discourse of power" (Araújo & Maeso 2016: 7). And this is why post colonization, India or any modern nation, can share in and extend that very discursive force in the governance of its own populations.

We have seen those outside Europe's cognitive empire be re-invented within it as modernity's manageable exterior, where "indigenous populations provided the mirror in which Europe, as an identity and culture, could recognize itself as modern." (Aman in Grosfoguel 2016: 101). This does not, therefore, result in the complete annihilation of *anthropoi*, but rather their perpetual reinvention. There is then a crucial relationship between universality and plurality that displaces a heterogenous subjectivity by a homogenous one that needs to be explained. To stabilize and unify Euro-American subjectivity into a scientific standard, the other is re-animated as a

²⁸ "The clay is one, but the Fashioner has fashioned it in many ways" (GGS 1350); "The One is One, but He is diffused in many forms: bring in, bring in, that All-pervading One" (GGS 1293)

perpetually and changing threat. Hence the filmic stereotype of the cool, calm and collected white man being faced by wild, frenzied hordes: modernity is our epic hero taming the jungle into concrete plazas, dark labyrinths into overlit malls, and the wilderness into a circus or zoo. Hence the ideological function of Hegel's classification of religion into a developmental order that moves from the complex and obscure to that which makes (Christian) sense. Thus "manufacturing, maintaining and securing of ethno-racial homogeneity in the European nation-state" was intimately and inseparably tied to "managing of heterogeneity in the colonies" (Goldberg 2002, 16, in Araújo & Maeso: 2016: 13). Hence,

The production of (national) European subjects also involves manufacturing the inappropriate "others," for example the Negro, the Indian, the Jew, the Moor, the Roma/Gypsy, and their proper location outside and inside Europe's borders, the establishment of the terms of their governance and their eventual inclusion in Europeanness. (Araújo & Maeso: 2016: 13).

The projection of chaos in the form of the (new) enemy functions to discipline subjectivity into coherent and homogenous units (be the enemy a virus, climate change, or alien invasion – a scale that maybe used to justify a global governance structure). Pick any modern nation and this process can be identified. Modi's Hindutva fetishization of Hindu "religion" to serve its "utopian/dystopian" Nazi-inspired racial purification agenda, or the secular rule the Gandhi dynasty easily fits the colonial template of manufacturing disorder (separatist movements) through monstrous identities: the Muslim, Sikh, Tribal "terrorists" that attack the innocent purity of the Indian National Self reduced to a single homogenous Hindu subjectivity. Here, as in colonial times, ... "legality and barbarity can go hand in hand" in the institutionalization of racism, casteism etc (Araújo and Maeso 2016: 30-31). Whether it is by boycotting of Muslim businesses, or bulldozing homes without warning claiming them to be illegally erected, brazen and arbitrary forms of "collective punishment" act out an agenda of ethnic cleansing – that serve to violently homogenize Indian subjectivity towards a Hindu dominant national form.²⁹ Araújo and Maeso show the developments of this trajectory:

²⁹ See the recent right-wing Hindutva-led violence in the majority Muslim district of Nuh in Haryana. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-66391485>

Crucially, the authors note how this hermeneutic process works to “configure the universality of European subjectivity as a political project” (2016: 45) which re-inscribes “the idea of a neutral epistemic subject” (Maldonado-Torres 2004, 2 cited in Araújo and Maeso 2016: 54) that can therefore view plurality of peoples and traditions without bias and so can legitimately claim scientific objectivity as (uniquely) its own. This interpretive paradigm can therefore even talk about “prejudice and ethnocentrism” and the importance of “learning about others” in today’s “multicultural” societies, and the need for “tolerance”, “dialogue”, “equality” and “mutual understanding” via an openness to “multiple perspectives” – while all the while, maintaining an actual “*monologue*, the monologue of liberal imperialists” (Araújo and Maeso 2016: 55?), that all are being converted to accept this European subject as their own self – for who would not want to appear rational, neutral and objective? Araújo and Maeso show

how multiperspectivity became tied to ideas of interculturality and multiculturalism in such a way that the debate on racism, education, and the teaching of history is dissolved into a question of *accommodating* difference and learning about other cultures and histories. (2016: 65)

Such accommodation keeps intact colonial modernity’s inviolable and unchanging rational subjectivity. This sly shift to tolerating difference disguises the various forces in which the subject is coerced to believe in, for example the necessity of violence for freedom, slavery for capitalism, inequality as natural competition, and the divorcing of mind from the body: to rule over nature and its “animal wild”. Dismantling publicly normalized prejudiced assumptions in one’s own subjectivity is harder to do than simply being asked to accommodate different cultures (with or without empathy).

The colonial epistemology that conceives of “man”, the “universal” and “plurality” together aid a private or secret process of self-making as “standing” predicated on others who are forced to “kneel”, but is presented in the metropole as though all could stand if they simply chose to. In the

colony, this PR pretense was absent: “kneeling” was publicly enforced.³⁰ For example, there are two notions of engaging the plurality of peoples and their ‘worlds’: Western *interculturality* – wherein the respect and tolerance of a diversity of views is argued for, but from the perspective that it can only happen if everyone converts to a European secular-(Christian) subjectivity, and abide by its laws, which grants European conceptual grammar and reason a universalized standing. But there are other ways to read diversity and connect beyond what makes rational sense. Imperialism’s rational imperative of utility displaces, for example, loving-relations of *bhakti/bhagti* that offer an alternative organizational force – for how many distortions and oversights multiply when an epistemology reduces Life to what can be measured? Thus, the South and central American *interculturalidad* begins, not from the presumed European universal, and a juridical culture of laws, but from their own particularity and need for restorative justice, after being colonized by Europe’s economic-epistemic order. At its base, intercultural literally implies inter-epistemic which should prime us to respect *interculturalidad*’s different embodied sensorium – with its own affect, reason, memory, orality, and cosmography. But western *interculturality* dismisses if not destroys all diversity and difference for western narration and then sells this homogeneous flattening as *everyone*’s “progress” toward an Enlightened subjectivity and “civilization”.

Interculturalidad is not concerned with protecting culturally diverse ways of being, or being accommodated, but rather resisting the negating force of neoliberal secular invisibilization, as Aman notes “the indigenous populations found themselves on the other side of the wall which separates the visible from the invisible part of the social space” (Aman in Grosfoguel 2016: 104). To come out of the shadows into the European light requires the conversion of one’s subjectivity – *through* notions of equity, diversity, inclusion, and even *interculturalidad*! As Aman notes, even though “Bolivia rewrote its educational policies in 1990s in accordance with *interculturalidad*”, once they were implemented by the government, “*interculturalidad* came merely to signify bilingual education” their profound decolonial dimension “was effectively erased” (2016: 105). Modernity’s beacon of Enlightenment simultaneously creates Ellison’s “Invisible Man,” who is

³⁰ On April 19, 1919, six days after the colonial massacre of Indians in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, Panjab, Miss Marcella Sherwood, a missionary, was attacked. General Reginald Dyer, who gave the orders for that massacre, instituted his infamous “Crawling Order” – that forbade Indians to walk, but must crawl for 180 meters located where Sherwood was attacked. A public flogging booth was erected in the middle of that lane.

denied the ability not only to think in his own tongue, but share publicly in an epistemology that does not deny his humanity.

If *interculturalidad* can be subsumed by the broader power of state institutions, so too can “decoloniality” be co-opted reflecting the “decolonization industry” (Singh, G. 2023; Taiwo 2020; Moosavi 2020). Here decolonial projects are defused by inclusion reducing their political force for systemic change into a performative rhetoric of metaphorical or apparent change (Tuck and Yang 2012). To placate the power of “cancel culture” by addressing student concerns regarding the highly-politicized notions of racism, “hate speech” and inclusion, universities, for example, have repeated the very structure of colonial modernity’s liberalism that shifts the problem of a different enunciation (of *colonial* injustice) to representation (of the same EuroAmerican *modern* “justice”) – thus displacing alternative epistemologies with the same colonial discourse. Similarly, Black History Month, DEI officers and programs, hiring quotas and diversity indices work to maintain the continuance of the system and its colonial epistemology rather than change it. As such they become symbolically staged performances, tokenistic add-ons, that fail to address a different vision of what a university could be, leading some to suggest that to decolonize universities might mean to abolish them (Moosavi 2020).³¹ A focus on epistemology and enunciation expresses the diversity of human concerns as legitimate, while representation merely vents the same discourse of identity politics that delegitimizes those very concerns.

When decolonization is reduced to metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012), then the shift away from epistemology to representation allows anyone to claim exclusion and victimhood, be they White American (right and left) or Hindutva nationalisms. These “reactionary political ideologies [are] based on the same mechanisms deployed by European colonialists, of highly selective, fabricated and essentialist conceptions of culture, identity and values” (Singh, G. 2023). Colonialism constructed a homogenous subjectivity – the “we” of the nation. The BJP/RSS “we” argues to be more “Indian” than the Congress “we”, viz., more religious than secular, but it is hardly less European. The zealous desire to homogenize and own the psycho-linguistic subjectivity of the nation is a power-play that goes back to colonial educational aims that T.B. Macaulay’s 1835

³¹ [add Grosfoguel, Mignolo on decolonial university]

Minute on Education exemplifies.³² Hence Moosvai's suggestion to abolish it, because indigenous languages have not only been "disqualified as tools for thinking" (Aman in Grosfoguel 2016: 108), but denied as markers of alternative subjectivities and epistemologies – the legacy of what Escobar has called "the monocultural, monoepistemic, and uninational state" – which persists to this day (cited by Aman in Grosfoguel 2016: 108).

As with the most interesting things, it is much easier to say what it is not than declare what it is. This holds true especially for the "aporetic pluriversal" of Gur-Sikhi. Kenneth Rose's nuanced 2013 book, *Pluralism: The Future of Religion* raises a number of important reflections that can help illuminate what is being argued for here – albeit through negating his apophatic pluralism.

(vi) *Decentralizing the West's cognitive empire – Kenneth Rose's apophatic pluralism*

Though Rose's work is useful as a bridge to Gur-Sikhi, it is by way of a certain epistemological undoing and decentralization of his Western liberalism that it is so – allowing us to distinguish between his *singular and exclusive* (Western-Abrahamic) One to Gur-Sikhi's *plural and inclusive* One (*Ek-Anek*). Though there is a resonance between his apophatic pluralism and Gur-Sikh's aporetic pluriversalism, regarding the necessary humility required when assessing the diversity of religious "revelations", from a decolonial perspective, there are also certain limitations inherited from a colonial epistemology in the former that I argue surface when compared to the latter.

Embedded in Christian-led discourses on inter-religious dialogue, Rose (2013: 8) reassesses the common tripartite typology: from *Exclusivism* (my particular tradition speaks universal truth alone), to *Inclusivism* (same, but weaker version where others particular traditions are at least acknowledged), to finally *Pluralism* (the humble acceptance of multiple grammars of truth, hence

³² "I have never found one [orientalist] among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.... We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, --a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population."

revealing the necessity to open to a more complex *cross-traditional* approach to reality). These transitions reflect the historical genesis in the Western academy: moving from an exclusivist and evangelist Theology towards an inclusivist Comparative Theology, ultimately reaching the pluralist context of critical secular Religious Studies. Rose charts this overall shift from insider to outsider perspectives – reassessing, and quite refreshingly, resisting a complete turn to critical secularity. “Over against a merely secular and cultural view of religion that take scientific explanations as the ultimate arbiter of truth,” Rose develops a certain method that respects the “immaterial realm of beatitude and deathlessness” he sees across traditions and the forte of religion (2013: 6). Rose does not explain away religion through a hermeneutics of suspicion, but sees a universal importance to “a religious, or spiritual, interpretation of life” (2013: 6) albeit via an academic analysis (2013:142).

Rose, thus, acknowledges the inseparability of the first two stages while resisting falling into an “unargued exclusivism or fully embracing pluralism” (2013: 11) because, “materialism is an underdetermined metaphysical view that cannot be made true by fiat” (2013: 15). Ironically, this is precisely what he ends up doing himself in arguing that the third stage of his qualified *apophatic* pluralism captures the way forward for *all*. How? And how is my *aporetic pluriversal* not also making the same mistake?

Rose dedicates a whole chapter to *The Parable of the Prisoners* – a summary of his whole argument that details the three stages outlined above. The prisoners (two Christians, two Hindus, a Buddhist and a Muslim) – who cannot but talk to each other – resolve to “find the truth”. Despite the small sample size and the curious omissions of Jews, Sikhs, Taoists, Confucianists, Jains as well as African, Australian and native American traditions, Rose assumes a “world religions” model of “religion” with its Christian-European genesis and bias.³³ The construction of the parable, curiously mimics the coercive “dialogue” (really monologue) reminiscent of the colonial encounter and its later imperial governance. Under such differential power relations (imprisonment) it is not “always good to talk”.³⁴

³³ In the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago 1893 for instance.

³⁴ For an elaboration in the colonial context see Bhogal (2010: 135).

Rose seems to repeat colonial scientism: to classify, compare, conceptualize, and grant rational control in the service of a discriminatory universalism without knowing it – ignoring the crucial role of affect (detailed in neurocognitive science, affect and animal studies, post- and decolonial studies, consciousness and mystical studies). This is evident in how he narrates the stages of this fictional “dialogue”. Firstly, all discussion among the prisoners “fail to change minds” (2013: 142) – i.e., the exclusivist position. Then the Mormon cites Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*, assessing a diversity of religious views concludes “while it is no doubt a possible alternative that none of them is true, it is certainly impossible that more than one should be so,” the “prisoners” eventually concur: “This agreement accords with the logical notion of a contrary, which implies that either one or none—but not all—of their doctrines might be true.” (2013: 142)

This consensus is unrealistic and curious, as religious traditions employ reason but are not bound to it as an ultimate arbiter of truth, as love nor life are matters of logic – a point he readily acknowledges. Nevertheless, in his perplexing view reason is still employed as the ultimate tool to decide matters:³⁵ all traditions have to, “as an incontestable point of logic,” accept that “my own position may *not* be the true one” (2013: 143). This is an important shift to humility – shared by Gur-Sikhi, but this shift’s (scientific) “knowledge” comes at the expense of “(religious) wisdom”, and all that is left for the prisoners is to *rationaly* seek a common truth or teaching *all can agree* upon – only to realize they cannot find one. And “when the irreconcilability of these doctrines and their incapacity for reduction to a common idea or essence become clear...[revealing the limits of logic]... The prisoners eventually conclude that the quest to find a common ground fails” (2013: 144).

Neither exclusion (of theology) nor inclusion (of comparative theology) seem to work – they need a new approach beyond cataphatic knowledge now that they’ve reached a certain level of epistemic humility. The third apophatic step beyond cataphatic “thick” description, and search for universal essences, is then entertained, one that can begin to see the future of religious pluralism. With “a new sense of the limitations of religious language and doctrine” they stress “an innate sense of divinity (*sensus divinitatis*)” that is a “kind of brilliant darkness beyond all expression” perceiving resonances across Christian darkness, Buddhist *shunyata* (emptiness) and

³⁵ See the work of Lewis Gordon (???)

Upanishadic negation (*neti neti*) – concluding that “no specific cataphatic religious teaching can be final because each one can be shown to be limited.” Thus, they begin to formulate the *apophatic* pluralist view (2013: 145).

Ironically, despite Rose's public “dialogue” his prisoners end up espousing a deeply subjective conclusion: “Giving up on doctrine as the most authoritative source of religious knowledge, this new convert to apophatic pluralism now subordinates doctrine to direct, contemplative insight into the nature of the ultimately real.” (2013: 146). The first two steps reflect a conversion to modernity. There is a sleight of hand in the third though, for this subordination does not seem to occur. In addition to public reason, Rose slips in mystical experience – by arguing there is a universal truth of meditative awareness shared by yogic *dhyana*, Buddhist *jhana* and Christian *recueillement* (2013: 160). But which is it – reason or mystical intuition? Theory or praxis? Can one use logic to establish the authority of mysticism, and once established what is left for reason to do? One cannot *ride* the bicycle of mysticism through a logical dialogue *thinking* about it. Furthermore, Asian religious praxis concerns perception, and perception is not about confidence (knowledge, identity) but clarity (*gyaan*, *prajna* etc). Sidestepping this illogical duplicity, Rose argues his parable “portrays the emergence through interreligious discussion of a theory of religious pluralism that is both apophatic and pluralistic” (2013: 146). And without a moment's hesitation he slips from hypothetical parable straight to policy to secure world peace:

Not long after this apophatic-pluralist epiphany, a peace treaty between the warring factions is signed in Geneva... It seems self-evident, therefore, that the time has arrived for theologies of religions to take apophatic pluralism as the default view over against any form of particularism. It is simply no longer possible to maintain rationally or as a matter of faith...this or that religion holds some final, privileged position. (2013: 146).

But not all traditions hold the notion of an exclusive ownership of the truth, nor believe the truth can be finally stated. Both of these are usually only witnessed in the Abrahamic and Vedic traditions. Rose concludes “no form of particularism can be the future of religion” (2013: 147). Repeating the colonial verticality and logic here where Western particular views assume the stature of universal significance, Rose's own universal also displaces or restricts others to a

particularism – requiring them to shift from cataphatic claims to an apophatic pluralism. *But why should the universal always displace the particular?* Is not the real issue how the universal is imagined? Rose is being exclusivist in his inclusiveness. Can religion be treated as a visible object that all can see and thus comment upon? Is rational language sufficient to the task of a diversity of religious truth-claims? Should we side-step who created “religion” and the “universal” as “general concepts” in the first place? The critiques by Dubuisson, Chidester, Gottschalk et al could well be applied to Rose’s thesis. Although Rose wants to safeguard Religious Studies from “the methodological materialism of natural science and the cultural and biological reductionisms of anthropology” (2013: 149), his whole argument operates within the secular superiority of a colonial epistemology – and this is despite him acknowledging the violent imposition of the West.³⁶ This only shows how difficult it is to notice its invisible/unconscious operations.

In this invented monologue presented as a dialogue, the same limitation with the western conceptualization of the universal can be seen, that can be helpfully challenged by the decolonial notion of the pluriversal that does not require the displacement of one’s particular tradition and conversion to a new one for meaningful cross-religious communication to arise – I contend, in Gur-Sikhi.³⁷ For, religious ineffability, the unnamable mystery of life, resists capture by any logic or cleverness (Japji) or any (secular or religious) technique or practice including meditation (Japji), or thinking for that matter: the way of life/god/truth cannot be thought (Japji) because it is “ever-fresh and ever-new”.³⁸ The resultant epistemic humility is foundational for Gur-Sikhi. *Those who say they know are the greatest of fools* (Japji); knowledge and reason are lowly affairs in the context of wisdom (*gyaan*) and love (*bhagati*) – humility is not about being nice, but a necessity to be human – which places listening above speaking, demonstrably *contra* the West.³⁹ Those, like Guru Nanak, who cross many frontiers for two decades on foot see things plainly: the truth

³⁶ – be that “exclusive truth of imperial Christianity”, or “the superiority of classical Greco-Roman culture”, or “the proselytizing universalism of the Enlightenment”, or “the revolutionary imperative of modernism”, or “the exclusive truth of missionary Christianity”, or “free-market capitalism, dialectical materialism, and scientific materialism” (2013: 153).

³⁷ In the historical (*itihās*), “hagiographical” (*janamsakhis*) and wider literature but also within the GGS – see *Sidh-Gost* (938-946).

³⁸ “*The teachings of the Truth are ever-new and the love of the Word ever-fresh*” (GGS 242).

³⁹ “*He Himself has come to me, in His Natural Way (sahaj). I know nothing, and I show nothing. I met Prabhu as would a child, and am blessed with peace*” (GGS 1307). Unlike adults, a very young child listens without ego. Note the Asian foregrounding of the centrality of hermeneutic failure of knowledge in the opening of the Tao Te Ching (*the name that can be named is not the eternal name*) and the GGS (*no matter how many times you think, the truth cannot be thought*).

abhors a monopoly, like nature abhors a vacuum: “*The One has many forms and is contained within all; how can I be fooled now?*” (GGS 1104).

Rose is still enunciating the western-Secular Christian form of representation which has always been about controlling diversity (often seen as threat) operating within the paradigm of European Man. Why hasn’t the West progressed beyond (a pseudo) rational dialogue? Why should this European intellectual tradition be treated as the only epistemic lineage that can yield a universal truth? Why should a theoretical stance be what the world needs in the first place? And notice his schema is not coming from practitioners of religious communities, but scholars – again paralleling the authority of knowledge production in colonial modernity where theory leads (religious and/or embodied) praxis.

Perhaps the “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World” as Shelley argued; and as poetry cannot be translated into another idiom or language as it resists being re-presented, it is aporetic and pluriversal – poetry naturally differs from itself across the globe – unlike science – which pretends to be its opposite, constantly pitting the universal against the particular. Poetry, on the other hand, retains its particularity and speaks the “universal” *through* its particularity. Rather than require everyone to think the same (about language, logic, universal, particular etc) the Sikh Gurus encouraged others to think through their diverging revelations *more attentively to reach and contact the living poetic Word in their traditions*, thus not displacing the plurality of traditions and practices nor reducing them to a particularly Western colonial grammar of logic. Rose’s duplicitous focus on logic and “contemplative” life of mystical experience are both rejected by Guru Nanak: for nothing can secure or guarantee access to the truth – not religion, not science, not thought nor the sweetest meditation, not asceticism nor hedonism, not technique nor any method (GGS 1 *Jap* M1).

Rose’s own need to keep cataphatic theory in *dialectical* tension with apophatic challenges (2013: 160) is ignored when he proposes “apophatic pluralism *as the default view over and against* any form of particularism”. Guru Nanak does not make this move to the colonial-modern universal, he does not sell out the original *aporia* of life with any metaphysical theory. He sings the universal through each particular – and the ability to travel to each with love and wonder is premised on

epistemic humility and the sharing of concepts and items. Embracing both cataphatic and apophatic dimensions (parallel with *sargun* and *nirgun*) cannot lead anywhere else but a wonderous aporia not just the negation of apophasis. Furthermore this wonder, this life, is a spontaneously-creative (*karata purakh*), fearless (*nirbhau*), hateless (*nirvair*), birthless-deathless intelligence (*ajunii-saibhang, hukam*) that communicates constantly to us psychologically (*antarjami*) and sociologically (*sat-sangat*) – this is the Guru’s *pluriversal* Word – the root of all languages, a Word that communicates through any and all languages through their affective depth. *Aporia* represents this intelligent, deeply personal, communication that cannot be finally grasped and re-represented as a universal truth for all to know. This embodied wisdom makes a mockery of knowledge’s desire to grasp it, name it, speak it, (GGS 6) for there is not a vertical hierarchy from enemy to friend, black to white, immanence to transcendence, from relative truth to absolute truth, from *sargun* to *nirgun* – as “the Creator is in the creation, the creation is in the Creator” (GGS 1350); “God is in the soul and the soul is in God” (GGS 1153) “like Gold and the bracelet, or Water and the waves” (GGS 93); thus undercutting the western notion of linear progress. The Buddhist Mahayana *prajnaparamita* texts puts it this way: guided by compassion the Bodhisattva strives earnestly to save all sentient beings, but guided by wisdom at no time should s/he believe there are such things as sentient beings to be saved (Conze 1978: 79). Those that can balance these opposing forces of – compassion (*karuna*) and wisdom (*prajna*) gain skill-in-means (*upaya-kausalya*). Elsewhere, I have argued that Gur-Sikhi is a form of skilful means – and like the Buddha’s *dhamma*, a transformative healing, rather than a doctrinal view (Bhagal 2001). Individual healing cannot be generalized into a universal truth – hence Guru Nanak’s *aporetic pluriversal*.⁴⁰

Rather than Rose’s three logical steps that chart a linear or diachronic movement to the truth, other models employ a synchronic analyses attuned to the full complexity of and range of movements derived from actual dialogues with an immense variety of religious adepts ordained as leaders in their orders. For example, Andrew Rawlinson’s (1997) paradoxical model does

⁴⁰ The recent *Pew Research Center* published its “Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation” report. Sidestepping the colonial episteme it employs (still using western notions of “tolerance” as comparative tools, as well as the “world religions” model etc), it does discover that “Indians’ concept of religious tolerance does not necessarily involve the mixing of religious communities,” where others see a “melting pot” Indians see a “patchwork fabric” (2021: 11). But is there evidence for Gur-Sikhi’s aporetic pluriversalism? In short, yes: “More Sikhs than members of other religious groups see common ground among religious groups in India” (2021: 73).

precisely this and gets us much closer to Gur-Sikhi's aporetic pluriversalism – as it simulates something approximating Guru Nanak's *udasis*. This model is composed of two axes – running from Hot (transcendent) to Cold (immanent) on the vertical axis that intersects with Structured paths to Unstructured paths on the horizontal axis – producing four quadrants. Thus *structured-hot* traditions like esoteric Christian movements are diametrically opposed to *unstructured-cold* traditions like Zen and teachers like Krishnamurti. There is no need for a (coerced) “dialogue” to “resolve” all contradictions (where Truth has a path of many initiations in the former, and Truth is a pathless land in the latter). Here contradictions reflect the limits of language expression, given the inevitable hermeneutic failure of any grammar, for the supreme unavoidable complexity and intelligence of creation is taken for granted as unresolvable – thinking cannot avoid the *aporia* at the heart of things. All traditions over time develop expressions that range into all four quadrants, and they can and do change their mode of transmission across generations – that's how complex religious plurality is and religious traditions are. These four quadrants reflect the diversity and difference of traditions without a higher narrative to resolve, reduce, re-state that difference into some abstraction – that makes sense at the level of the rational mind. Rawlinson is happy to earnestly record the immense diversity of spiritual life as it occurs through actual dialogues (over a decade of research) that reveal clear ambiguity, and contradiction – understood as a “coincidence of opposites”. He does not want to control the narrative and has no agenda about aiding world peace – but clearly sees the value in multiple epistemologies, methods, psycho-cosmologies of various traditions and their teachings.

Similarly, the GGS does not tell an abstracted story that explains everything – for it is not a knowledge but a healing wisdom. In the Gur-Sikh context, the plurality of traditions in their particularity is seen as a wonder, as a legitimate creation of the Creator – ultimately one cannot say who is good who is evil, who is friend who is enemy because of a unity that connects all. Thus, at the heart of *aporia*, is not only humility (*nimta*) of not knowing,⁴¹ but the wonder and astonishment (*vismad*) tied to a sincere and passionate study of Life's intelligent but unrepresentable nature. That the truth of life is everywhere in every tradition, in every language (revealed or not) in every person (high or low, rich or poor, black or white, brahmin or shudra,

⁴¹ (As noted above) Guru Arjan sings: “He Himself has come to me, in His Natural Way (*sahaj*). / I know nothing, and I show nothing. / I met Prabhu as would a child (*baale*) and am blessed with peace” (GGS 1307).

Sikh or non-Sikh, man or woman, human or animal) means that we have to move beyond the western discriminatory universal that always displaces practices of the body in favor of theory of the mind and pits friend against enemy as an eternal truth. We have towards the pluriversal that poses a world in which many worlds can fit, where the base-line is “friend-friend” (*sajan-mit*) accepting Life omits a pattern that cannot be recognized contra AI’s algorithms and this spurs us to think harder to respect that wonder.